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Anarchism and the Liberation of West Papua

Current Affairs

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Why are there anarchists—who are anti-statist and aim for the destruction of the very roots of statist systems—that support the independence of West Papua and the creation of a new State there?

Anarchism is the concept of an ideal social system which aims for the abolition of the State, capitalism, and various forms of domination. The history of anarchism itself has been going strong for hundreds of years all over the world. In achieving their goals, anarchists have sometimes advocated using violence as a method of struggle in some conditions. The State has committed violence against the Indigenous people of West Papua, that is why armed struggle against Indonesia's state apparatus is necessary and why we, the anarchists, need to support it. The liberal approaches that always say "violence is bad" is absurd in the face of the repressions Papuans face every day by the colonial power in Jakarta.

Anarchists have long been (and continue to be) involved in struggles for national liberation such as Palestine from Israel, Catalonia and the Basque country from Spain, Ireland from the British Empire, and even the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) from the Netherlands. Why were and are anarchists involved in all these struggles?

The answer to that question can be answered if we briefly look at the above definition of anarchism, that being, *the abolition of the various forms of domination*. Resisting "domination" can include many struggles, such as that against racism, sexism, homophobia, and also *colonialism*. Anarchists *must* be in opposition to colonialism, because it is also a form of domination of one person over another person, one nation over another nation.

Colonialism inevitably leads to other forms of domination such as racism, sexism, and the exploitation of nature. West Papua was one of the independent territories that was forcibly annexed by the Sukarno regime on May 1, 1963 through the manipulative Act of Free Choice 1969 (PEPERA) which was held by the Indonesian State using guns and death threats. PEPERA was a referendum called by the United Nations for Papuans to choose if they wanted to be independent or joined as part of Indonesia. After this forced annexation, a nightmare began on the land of Cendrawasih (the Indigenous name for the area). This nightmare saw the killing of hundreds or even thousands of Indigenous West Papuans (OAP) by the Indonesian colonial apparatus, the exploitation of West Papua's natural resources, and the massive migration of non-Papuan peoples. Colonialism also brought racism to West Papua, and West Papuans are now stigmatized as primitive humans, forest people, lazy people, and many other degrading insults.

Free West Papua Protest in the Melbourne CBD on August 2012 asking for the release of Filep Karma, the freedom fighter serving 15 years in jail for raising the Morning Star at a rally in 2004. The campaign is also calling on the release of all West Papuan political prisoners. Image by Nichollas Harrison on Wikimedia Commons.

Anarchists have many reasons to involve themselves in the struggle for national liberation: anarchists fight for the possibility of anarchy, fight to stop the influence of right-wing groups in the political struggle for national liberation, or simply to practice solidarity with oppressed peoples. Anarchists distinguish between the different meanings of the homeland and of the State. Papuan indigenous peoples love and respect their homeland, a sacred entity that they considered as "mama" in their culture which they mean to defend with all their lives. Meanwhile, the State is a man-made entity that desires power, control, and domination over the community.

To quote Peter Kropotkin, an anarchist theorist from Russia:

> 'True Internationalism will never be attained except by the independence of each nationality, little or large... If we say no government of man by man, how can (we) permit the government of conquered nationalities by the conquering nationalities?'

As Kropotkin suggested, a free society cannot be established in a colony, and the freedom which resulted from Indonesian independence is a pseudo-freedom because while this freedom might have liberated the "main" peoples in Java, it oppresses and colonizes the Papuan peoples.

Anarchists are already involved in decolonisation and in the struggles of Indigenous peoples in the Americas, Australia and New Zealand. In Indonesia, and as anarchists, we can support the Papuan's struggle by sending any form of solidarity. We fight alongside the Papuans against the ultranationalist paramilitary that attacks any Papuan demonstration. Anarchism is about self-determination, including the self-determination of Indigenous peoples from the domination of the State, especially the colonial State. West Papua is a nation that was naturally formed, while the country is a man-made entity.

Anarchists are different from other pseudo-left groups who only offer two choices: either support West Papuan independence and their bourgeois leaders, or do not support independence at all. Anarchists see the world in a broad view and can fight colonialism and imperialism in West Papua without pushing their national political figures. They do this by standing with the people, not the politicians. Anarchist support for the national liberation of West Papua does not mean support for the formation of a new West Papuan state, or support for nationalism itself. Anarchists are in solidarity with West Papua while promoting anarchy as the other alternative to forming a new State. Our core value is that the self-determination of colonized people is upheld. If West Papuans come to support the creation of a new State, we will fight to allow them to do so. However, we will be prepared to fight against the new State that is to come.

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